

# **TECHNICAL APPENDIX D: VISUAL IMPACTS**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Overview

This paper examines the relative visual impacts of the proposed alternatives. For each alternative, the following considerations are compared:

1. The alterations to important views and aesthetic features from selected public viewpoints.
2. Opportunities for views and other aesthetic experiences created by the different alternatives.
3. Unique visual and aesthetic considerations.

## Description of Alternatives

Four action alternatives were developed for the replacement of Piers 62/63 and Waterfront Park. A fifth no action alternative in which the piers are removed without replacement is also included for comparison.

## No Action/No Build Alternative

The No Action/No Build alternative would do nothing to Piers 62/63 and Waterfront Park until demolition became necessary. No habitat enhancements would be constructed.

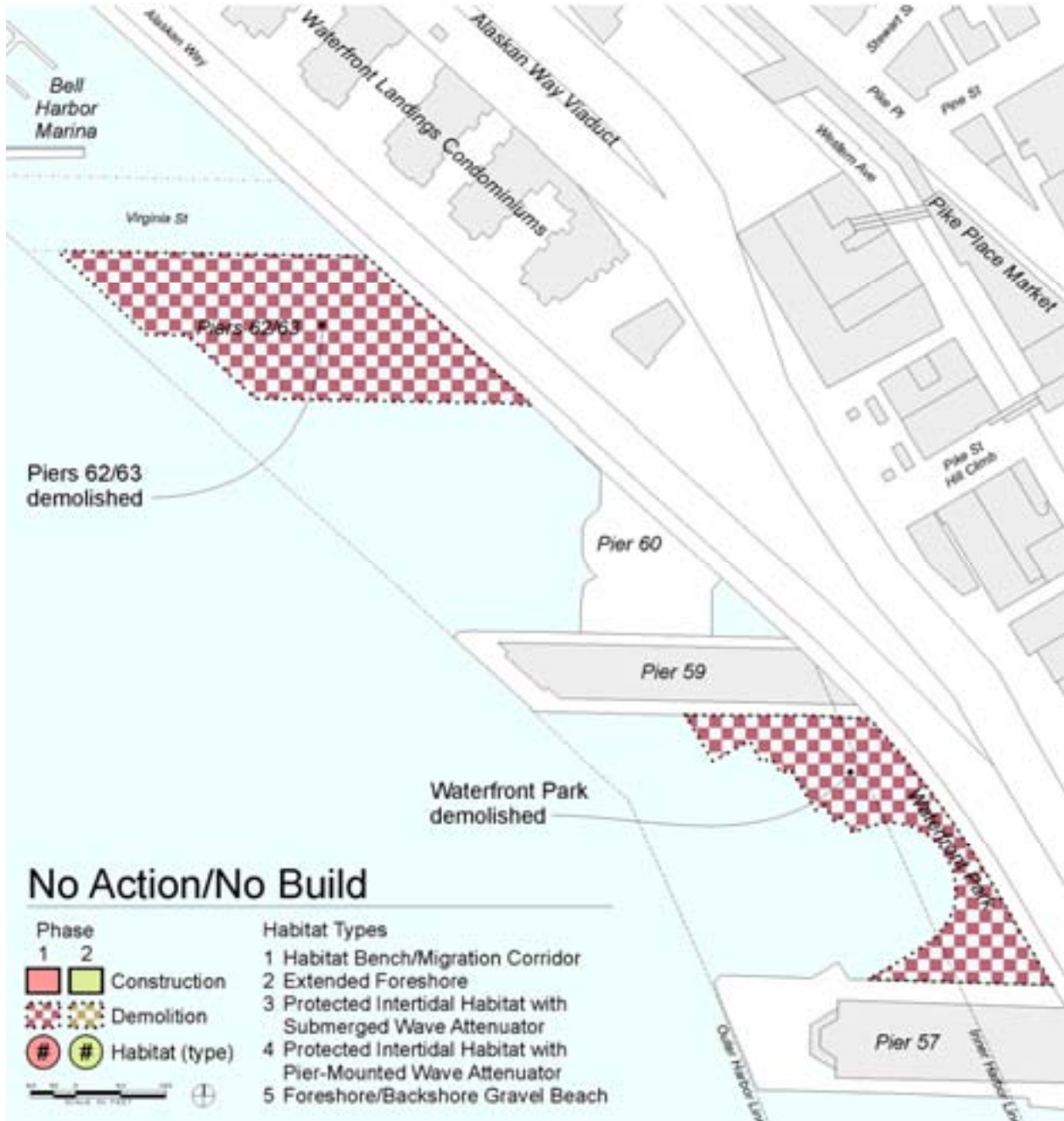


Figure 1. No Action/No Build alternative.

## Rebuild/Preservation Alternative

The Rebuild/Preservation alternative would rebuild Piers 62/63 as a similar structure in the same location but set away from the shoreline. Waterfront Park would be renovated in phase one, but then demolished, along with Pier 60, as part of the Aquarium's expansion. Habitat would be enhanced along the shoreline, except underneath the expanded Aquarium, including an accessible beach at today's Waterfront Park.

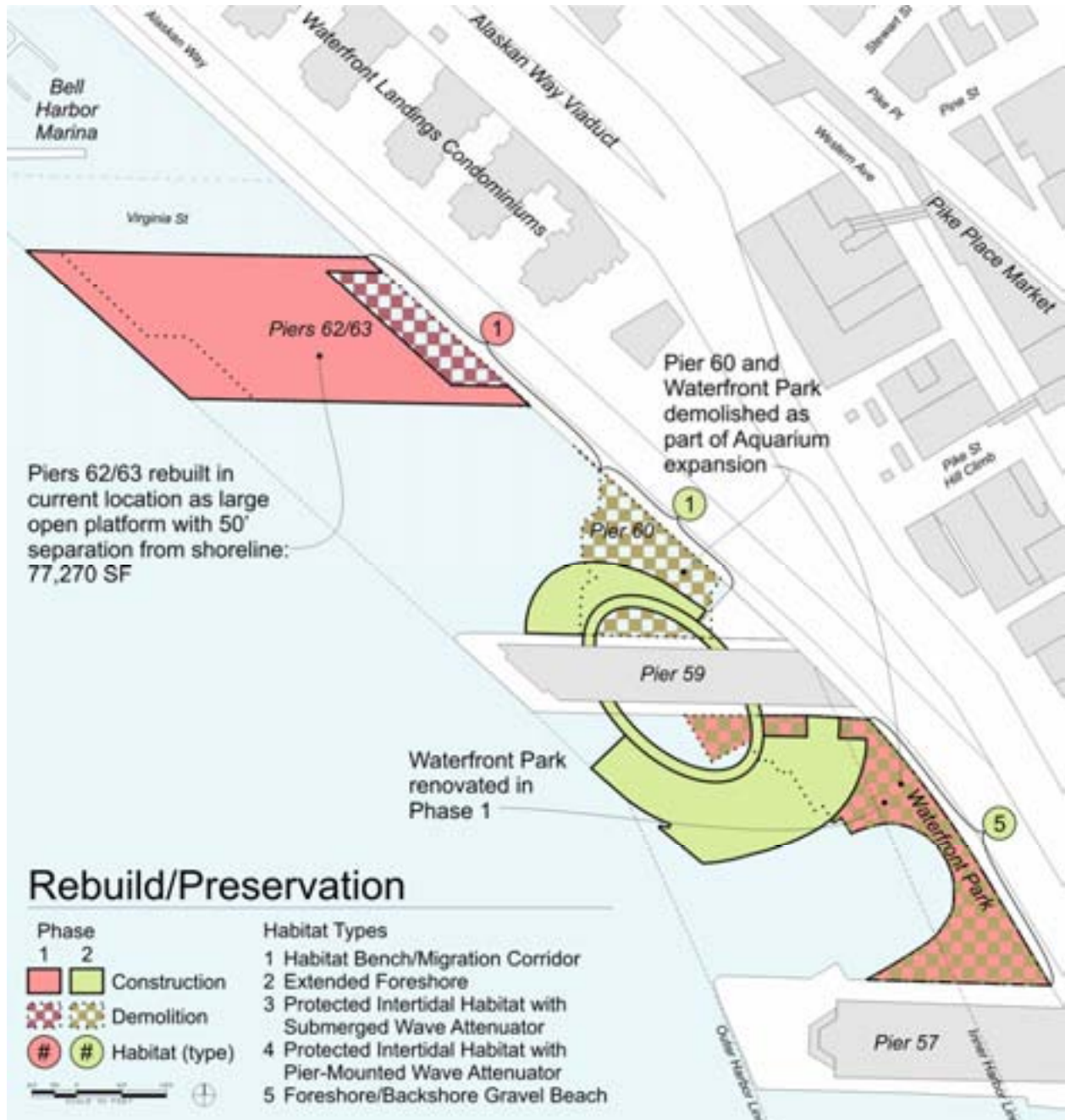


Figure 2. Rebuild/Preservation alternative.



## Aqua Link Alternative

The Aqua Link alternative would rebuild Piers 62/63 as a smaller structure closer to the Aquarium. It would also build a new deck connecting Piers 59 and 57. Waterfront Park and Pier 60 would be demolished as part of the Aquarium's expansion. Habitat would be enhanced along the shoreline, except underneath the expanded Aquarium, including an accessible beach from the northern edge of Pier 60 to the southern edge of the submerged Virginia Street right-of-way.

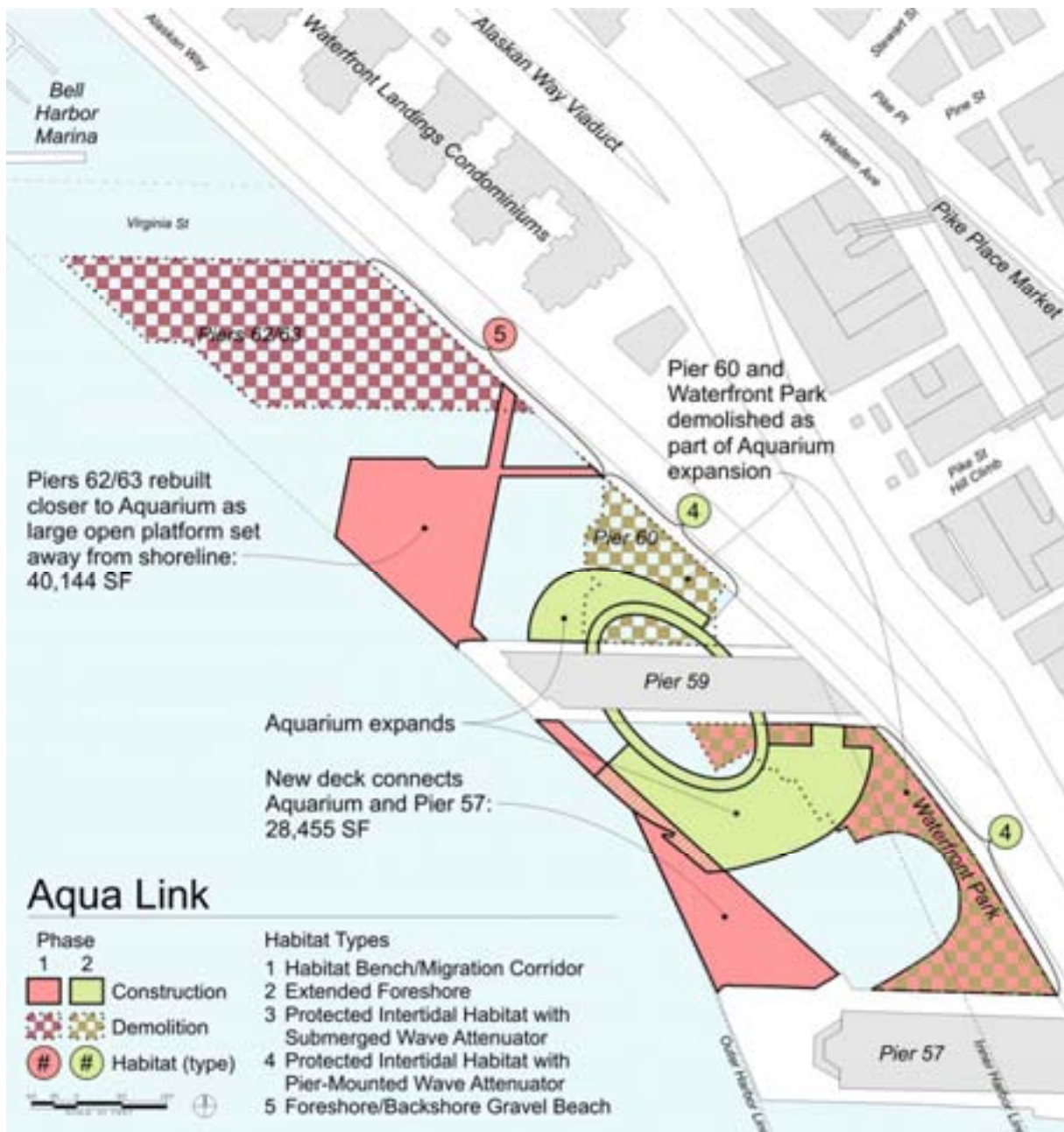


Figure 3. Aqua Link alternative.



## Connector Alternative

The Connector alternative would rebuild Piers 62/63 as a similar structure in the same location but set away from the shoreline. It would also build a slender footbridge and deck connecting to the Aquarium. Waterfront Park and Pier 60 would be demolished as part of the Aquarium's expansion. Habitat would be enhanced along the shoreline, except underneath the expanded Aquarium, including an accessible beach between the new pier and the northern edge of Pier 60.

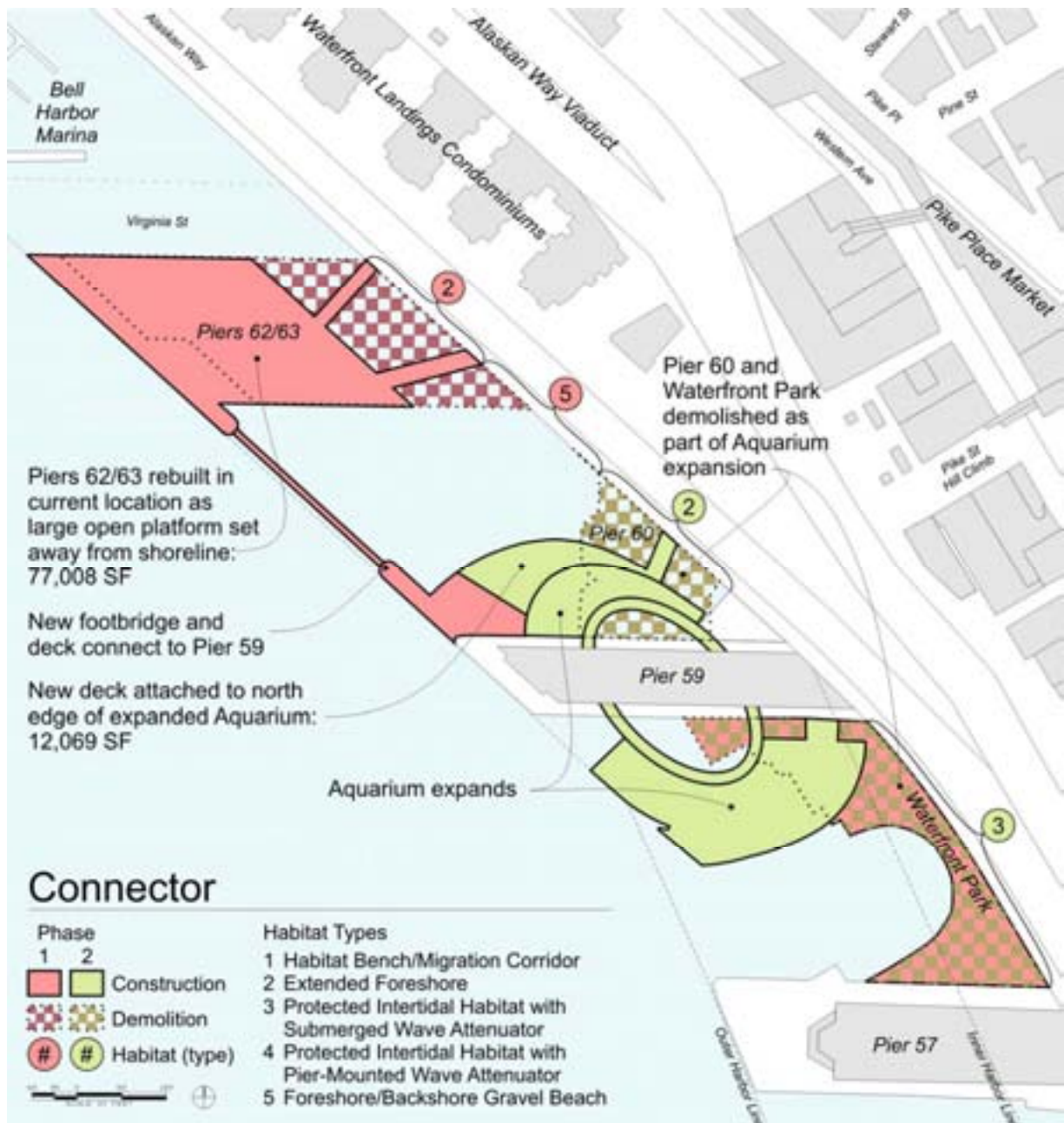


Figure 4. Connector alternative.

## Multi-Purpose Pier Alternative

The Multi-Purpose Pier alternative would rebuild Piers 62/63 as a large open platform abutting an expanded Aquarium and set away from the shoreline. Waterfront Park and Pier 60 would be demolished as part of the Aquarium's expansion. Habitat would be enhanced along the shoreline, except underneath the expanded Aquarium, including an accessible beach at today's Waterfront Park.

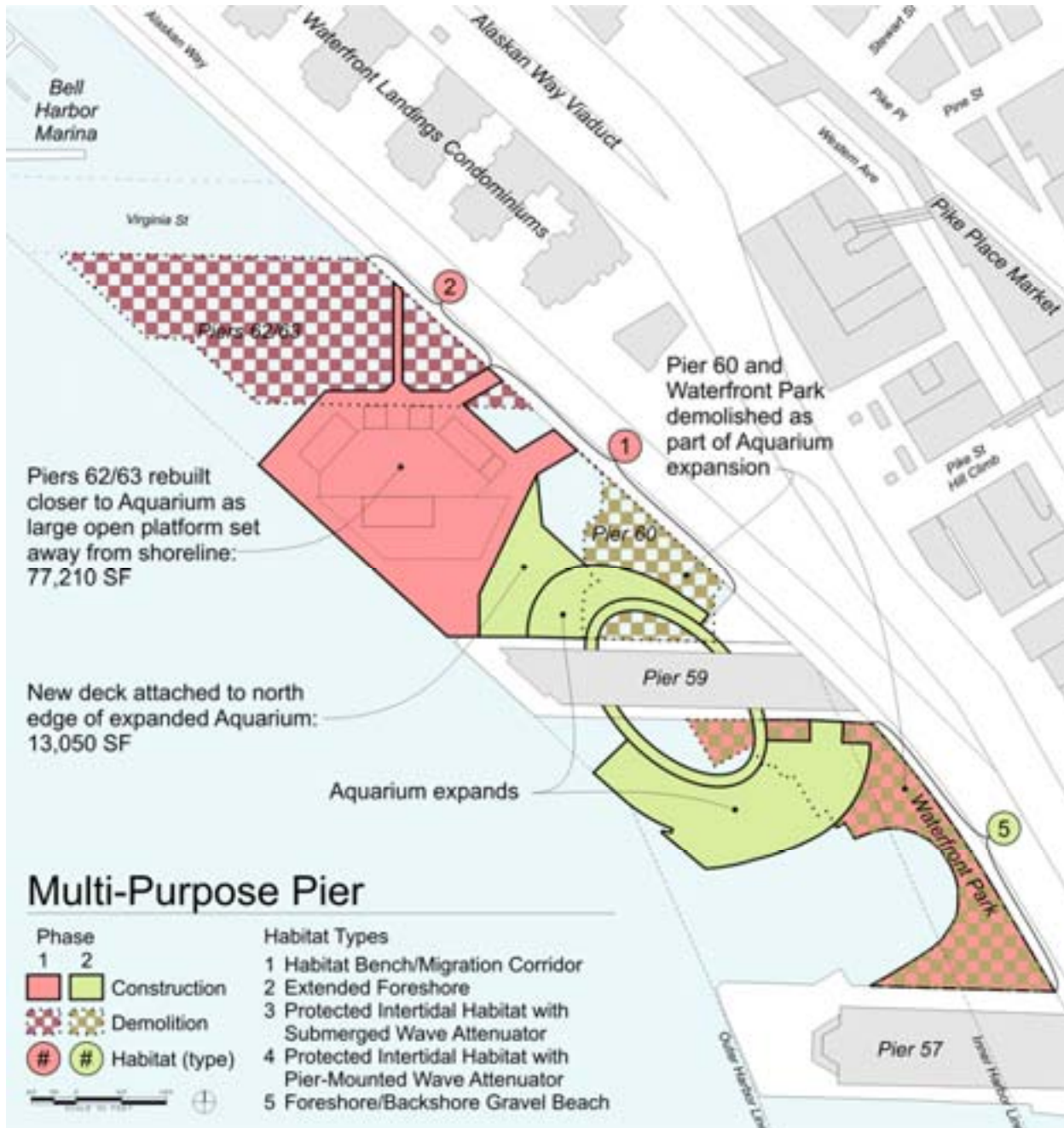


Figure 5. Multi-Purpose Pier alternative.

# AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

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## Views, Viewing Opportunities, and Visual Responses Considered

The complex of park properties—Waterfront Park, the Aquarium, and Pier 62/63—considered in this paper is a critically located and visually prominent element of Seattle’s Central Waterfront. Alterations to the current environment could affect:

- Views from public spaces and rights-of-way.
- Opportunities for appreciating the visual and aesthetic qualities of the Central Waterfront.
- Visual resources of the current park properties themselves, such as the art and fountain in Waterfront Park.

These aspects of the visual environment are discussed below.

### Views

Participants in a series of City-sponsored work sessions noted the importance of views of the water, mountains, city, and surrounding features of interest. The “Seattle City Council’s Principles for Waterfront Planning” includes the following statement:

*Promote the preservation of existing historic resources and new development that reinforces the uniqueness of place, reveals the dynamic nature of the shoreline, and reflects the spirit of the people of Seattle and the Puget Sound region. Honor and build upon the area’s cultural and historic development pattern to provide a sense of continuity with the past, as well as link to the future. Recognize the historic resources in the waterfront area as an important component of the area’s development pattern. . . . Extend the reach of the waterfront, in terms of visual access and physical connections, as far inland as possible. Maintain water views from Downtown streets and public spaces, and provide public view corridors to strengthen visual access.*

There are innumerable views of these elements from a number of public spaces. For the purpose of this study, views

are modeled from a representative set of viewpoints identified in Figure 6.

The City has inventoried 86 public View Sites to be protected under SEPA. These sites are identified in Seattle's Environmental Policies governing the review and conditioning of physical development in the city (SMC 25.05.675P). These sites represent the extent to which the City of Seattle historically has considered public views in the review and conditioning of development through the Master Use Permit and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review process.

Steinbrueck Park and Waterfront Park are the only view sites potentially affected by this project

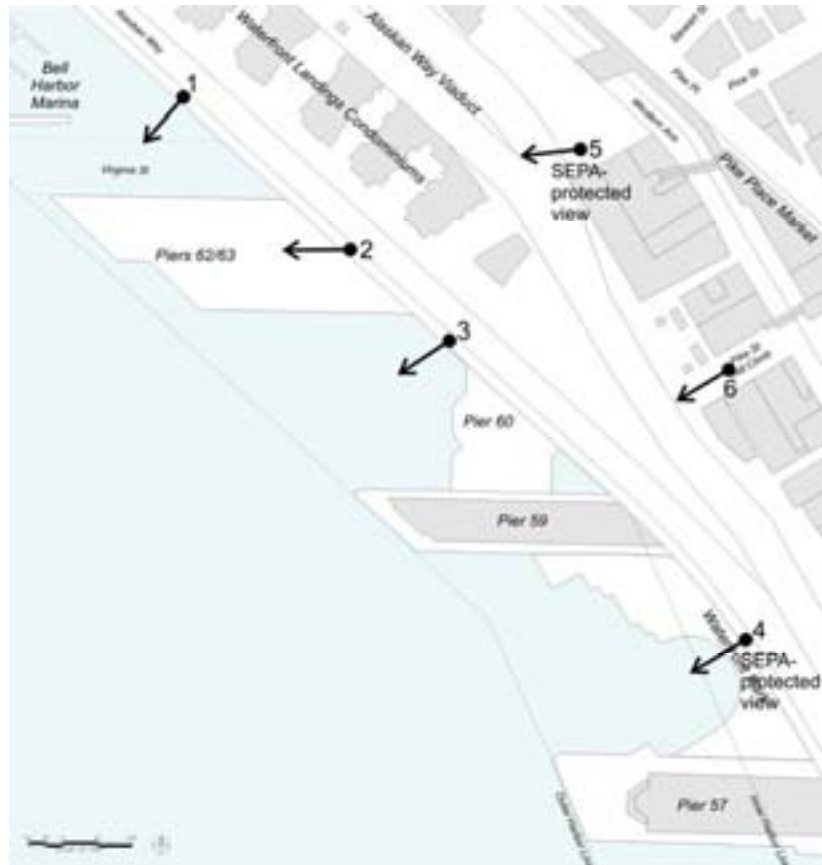


Figure 6. Views evaluated.



## Opportunities for Appreciating the Visual and Aesthetic Qualities of the Central Waterfront

This aspect of the visual impacts deals with views *from* the park spaces and access to other aesthetic experiences.

The current Waterfront Park offers several view opportunities. There are two towers that offer viewpoints above the deck. The major benefit of this is that visitors can look down on the decks of some vessels, such as tugs and barges. The towers also offer dramatic views back at the city skyline and onto the surface of the park itself. The large semicircular esplanade is a unique visual feature on the waterfront, as well. As noted above, Waterfront Park is a designated view site and contains view towers and platforms from which to enjoy unique views.

The Aquarium and Piers 62/63 provide excellent views on their western margins.

## Visual Resources of Current Park Properties

In addition to views, the parks include several visual resources of note. Parks properties include a 1991 public arts project titled *Piers 62/63*. This project is a wire mesh fence around the piers' perimeter with a series of questions painted on it in red, which appear and disappear depending on the viewer's position and the conditions of light, sky, and water. This artwork, which has deteriorated and is now barely visible, may be protected by various rights and copyrights, including the Visual Artist Rights Act, and may require release from the designers/artists to deaccession and remove the work.

Waterfront Park includes a sculpture of Christopher Columbus and a centrally located fountain.

The Aquarium is the site's notable historic structure and is currently undergoing a renovation.



1. View from sidewalk N. Of Pier 62/63  
Toward SW



2. View from sidewalk at Pier 62/63  
Toward W



3. View North of Aquarium  
Toward SW



4. View from Waterfront Park  
Toward W



5. View From Steinbrueck Park  
Toward W



6. View From Bottom of Pike Street Hill Climb  
Toward Aquarium

Figure 7. Existing views.

# POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

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The evaluation of potential impacts is performed by analyzing representative views for each alternative. Rather than a scoring system based on the severity of the impact and the importance of the view or visual resource, this paper simply presents computer-modeled views for each alternative and existing conditions. A summary matrix compares the most important impacts of each alternative.



*Figure 8. The Aqua Link, Connector, and Multi-Purpose Pier all include the construction of a gravel cobble beach to improve nearshore habitat characteristics. Above are some examples of constructed beaches in urban areas.*



## **No Action/No Build Alternative**

### **Operational Impacts**

This alternative would allow both Waterfront Park and Piers 62/63 to deteriorate until they would require demolition. This alternative would provide additional open water from many viewpoints, and there would be no potential obstructions to views of the Olympics. However, many of the activities and visual qualities that attract people to the shoreline would be lost. There would be no public space, except the Aquarium apron, where people could move over water to enjoy views up and down the waterfront.

### **Construction Impacts**

This alternative has the significant disadvantage that it would allow the piers to decay until they were removed. Depending on the timing of pier removal, this period of gradual deterioration would create the most significant adverse construction phase impact of all alternatives.

## **Rebuild/Preservation Alternative**

### **Operational Impacts**

From a visual standpoint, this scheme would maintain the status quo and have only minimal impact. The replacement pier would extend to the Outer Harbor Line and so would be situated westward approximately 30 feet. A near-shore habitat beach migration corridor would separate the replacement deck approximately 50 feet from the seawall. Under this scenario, Waterfront Park would be renovated so that its visual attractions would be retained and, depending on the design, enhanced.

### **Construction Impacts**

While the replacement of decks for both Piers 62/63 and Waterfront Park would require substantial construction work, it would affect a smaller area. However, it could be argued that this is not a significant difference.

## Aqua Link Alternative

### Operational Impacts

The Aqua Link alternative substantially alters the location over water of Piers 62/63 and Waterfront Park and so will revise the views of the water from the land. Moving Piers 62/63 to the south will open waterward views south of the Bell Street Pier.

On the other hand, the new pier/deck will extend over water just north of the Aquarium. The reconfiguration of Waterfront Park to extend further off shore will block views of the water surface, but not necessarily the views of Elliott Bay, the Sound, and the mountains to the west. (See Figure 9 for visualizations of view impacts.

The Aqua Link alternative would provide additional views from the park properties. Both the new Piers 62/63 deck and the reconfigured Waterfront Park would provide a long esplanade along their western margins.

Since no change to existing plans is prescribed for the Aquarium, visual impacts to this structure will be negligible. However, the esplanade connection along the Aquarium's west face will be an excellent linear viewing corridor.

The Aqua Link would alternative include the removal of the fence art on Piers 62/63 and the Waterfront Park fountain. However, it would construct a gravel/cobble beach habitat area north of the relocated Piers 62/63 deck that would provide a naturalized setting and the opportunity to view (and, perhaps, access) a more natural shoreline.

### Construction Impacts

The Aqua Link alternative would require extensive in-water work, and so views of the water would be partially obstructed during construction.



1. View from sidewalk N. Of Pier 62/63  
Toward SW



2. View from sidewalk at Pier 62/63  
Toward W



3. View North of Aquarium  
Toward SW



4. View from Waterfront Park  
Toward W



5. View From Steinbrueck Park  
Toward W



6. View From Bottom of Pike Street Hill Climb  
Toward Aquarium

Figure 9. Views from the Aqua Link Alternative.

## Connector Alternative

### Operational Impacts

The Connector alternative will have the most impacts on open water views because it includes a slender footbridge between the Aquarium and the rebuilt Piers 62/63. While the footbridge will provide excellent views westward and toward the city, it will diminish open water views from that area. Conversely, the removal of the Waterfront Park deck will increase the immediacy of water views from the Union Street vicinity.

The pedestrian bridge is intended as an attractive visual element in its own right. The Connector alternative generally maintains the footprint of the existing Piers 62/63, except much of the over-water coverage near the shoreline is removed. Because of this, the Connector adheres to the historical pier geometry.

The Connector alternative would require the removal of the Waterfront Park fountain and viewing structures. This would remove one of the city's Inventoried Public View Sites, but an unobstructed view of the water from the sidewalk as well as excellent view spaces would be added. However, the bridge, a beach between Piers 62/63 and the Aquarium, and a potential intertidal habitat at the current Waterfront Park would be added. It is unclear at this point whether or not the protected intertidal habitat would be seen as a visual asset because its general purpose is to provide a sheltered aquatic environment for algae and the food chain it supports.

### Construction Impacts

The Connector, like the Aqua Link alternative, would require extensive in-water work, which would diminish views of the horizon and Olympic Mountains during construction.



1. View from sidewalk N. Of Pier 62/63  
Toward SW



2. View from sidewalk at Pier 62/63  
Toward W



3. View North of Aquarium  
Toward SW



4. View from Waterfront Park  
Toward W



5. View From Steinbrueck Park  
Toward W



6. View From Bottom of Pike Street Hill Climb  
Toward Aquarium

Figure 10. Views from the Connector Alternative.

## Multi-Purpose Pier Alternative

### Operational Impacts

By essentially moving Piers 62/63 south to the proposed Aquarium expansion site, the Multi-Purpose Pier alternative trades open water north of the Aquarium for open water south of Bell Harbor Marina. This alternative also removes the over-water deck of the current Waterfront Park. Figure 11 illustrates the view impacts of this configuration. Since this alternative emphasizes creating a space for a wide variety of events and gatherings, its visual qualities will depend on the event.

In terms of views from the park/Aquarium complex, this alternative has a significant advantage over the existing conditions and rebuild options in that it includes enough space to allow a perimeter walkway around the deck—even if there is a big event on the deck itself. This provides much more public viewing opportunities than Piers 62/63, which were closed off for major events, such as Summer Nights at the Pier season.

The Multi-Purpose Pier alternative also features a gravel beach at the current Waterfront Park site.

### Construction Impacts

The Multi-Purpose Pier alternative would require extensive in-water work, and so views of the water would be partially obstructed during construction.





1. View from sidewalk N. Of Pier 62/63  
Toward SW



2. View from sidewalk at Pier 62/63  
Toward W



3. View North of Aquarium  
Toward SW



4. View from Waterfront Park  
Toward W



5. View From Steinbrueck Park  
Toward W



6. View From Bottom of Pike Street Hill Climb  
Toward Aquarium

Figure 11. Views from the Multi-Purpose Pier Alternative.



## Summary

Visual impacts are among the most subjective and difficult to assess. Beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder. Some may value the views of open water as the highest priority. Others will prefer a well-designed structure framing a view or a pier filled with color and activity. Therefore, this appendix provides no specific objective analysis evaluating the various impacts in terms of their positive or negative features. The visualizations do, however, provide a relatively accurate portrayal of each alternative's appearance, and the chart below summarizes the most salient features of each. Except for the No Action/No Build alternative, the alternatives' construction phase impacts are very similar.

**Table 1. Summary of View Impacts**

ALTERNATIVE	VIEWS	VIEWS FROM PIERS AND OTHER VISUAL RESOURCES
No Action / No Build	There would be open water from Pier 57 to Bell Harbor Marina, except for the Aquarium.	There would be no physical or visual amenity in this section of the waterfront.
Rebuild / Preservation	Rebuild/Preservation would provide minimal change from current views.	This alternative would involve minimal change from current conditions.
Aqua Link	Aqua Link would trade open water views from the north end of the Aquarium for a wide open water area south of Bell Harbor. The new over-water pier south of the Aquarium would be visible from Union Street.	This alternative would provide continuous views from the piers. A new cobble beach and protected intertidal habitats would add visual interest and a unique waterfront feature.
Connector	Connector would provide more open water views at the current Waterfront Park. The bridge would partially block views from the Aquarium to Piers 62/63.	The bridge could be considered an attractive waterfront landmark, and it would provide excellent views of the waterfront and downtown. This alternative would also include a small gravel beach and larger protected intertidal habitat.
Multi-Purpose Pier	Multi-Purpose Pier would trade open water views from north of the Aquarium for similar views south of Bell Harbor. Demolition of Waterfront Park would leave open water there.	Depending on the event, the larger pier could be an amenity in itself. People would be able to access the water's edge during the event season.